DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 191 139 EA 012 870

AUTHOR Shaker, Paul
TITLE Curriculum Change in the Developing Country: The Case of Saudi Arabia.
PUB DATE Apr 80
NOTE 19p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (Boston, MA, April 7-11, 1980). Appendix containing reprints of copyrighted newspaper articles has been removed from original document.

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Cultural Context: *Curriculum Development; *Developing Nations; Economic Development; *Educational Development: Elementary Secondary Education; Foreign Countries; Higher Education; Program Development; Technological Advancement
IDENTIFIERS *Saudi Arabia

ABSTRACT

Based on current thought in multicultural education, this paper discusses the need for Americans to help Saudi Arabia integrate western technology into education without subjecting the country to cultural imperialism. The paper is purported to rest on the "reconceptualist" theories of curriculum development. The author cites four particular cases of attempted curriculum development in Saudi Arabia. These cases are related to vocational education, computer assisted instruction, intermediate reading materials, and political and social life. In presenting each, the author attempts both to illuminate the state of curriculum development in Saudi Arabia and to extract helpful lessons that Saudi Arabian culture holds for the West. The author concludes that there is a valid multicultural road to educational development that can benefit all parties concerned and denigrate none of them. (JM)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED191139

U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

Curriculum Change in the Developing Country: The Case of Saudi Arabia

For Presentation at the Annual Meeting
American Educational Research Association,
Boston, April 7-11, 1980.

by: Paul Shaker, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor, Education
Mount Union College
Alliance, Ohio 44601
USA

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

P. Shaker

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

EA 012 870

With studies in curriculum design and several years of application as a background, the opportunity came to the author to serve as an administrator in educational research in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. After two years of professional activity and residence in central Arabia it seems important to state, so far as one's abilities allow, in the argot of curriculum, how American and Saudi educational development might be cooperatively served. At the 1979 Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Riyadh University's Educational Research Center held a Division G Symposium[1] reviewing its work and also offered proposals for educational reform in a Curriculum Division Critique Session.[2]

Having participated in that Saudi effort and having listened to the American response, one can attempt a next step, i.e., to develop a bicultural analysis aimed at needs identified by Saudi and American educators in dialogue. Most prominent among the comments of Americans was the interest of urban educators[3] working for true alternatives for city school reform; and the critique of Dr. Matthew Miles,[4] who called upon educators practicing in Arabia to build on the experience of educational reform in America but not to replicate it. There was an encouraging tone of mutual respect in these exchanges.

In what follows here an attempt is made to apply current thought in multicultural education[5] to curriculum development in Saudi Arabia. The need for such research arises from the persistent efforts of the government of Saudi Arabia to supplement the Arabian educational heritage with ideas and technology from America. Although consultants are called in, doctoral candidates dispatched, and billions of riyals invested,[6] the process of implementing multicultural education remains daunting. At stake is the continuity of the Arabian culture which is threatened by political vulnerability if development does not proceed; or, on the other hand, by spiritual dispersion if development turns pell-mell into revolution. It would appear obvious that the Saudis have reason to steer between Scylla and Charybdis despite the plaints of the emergent Islamic right[7] and the familiar Marxist left.

Observers in the developing world are well aware of the manifestations of "cultural imperialism." Multicultural education becomes a vehicle for such subversion when a mutual, "active" respect is lacking;[8] that is, when the agents of both cultures do not receive one another as equals working toward common goals. If this mutuality is absent, multicultural efforts are likely to become expressions of "malefic generosity"[9] on an international scale. As a case in point, the Saudis are not seeking Westernization,* and

contributions toward that end are perceived at best as inappropriate. "The schools (were) to bring the instrumental advantages of Western progress," the analysis goes, "while retaining the purity of traditional culture."[10] To avoid the practice of cultural imperialism, American educators involved in an exchange with Saudi Arabia like the one proposed herein might ask: (1) "Are we addressing needs both we and the Saudis acknowledge as needs?", and, (2) "Are we ourselves willing to reciprocate by adapting symbols and systems from Arabian culture which may, in our judgement, forward our own quest for fulfillment?" What follows here is written from the point of view of one who answers these questions in the affirmative.

The following story illustrates the diversity of cultures and the potential inherent for misunderstanding. The interpretation which follows is a step toward conceptualizing such differences so that productive communication may result:

A Sweet and Sour Shaggy Dog Story

> A couple have returned from holiday with the sad story of how their pet poodle was accidently cooked as their main dish in a Chinese restaurant in Hongkong. Hans and Erna W. from Zurich, whose 'tale' appears in a Swiss newspaper which says they have asked for their full names not to be published because of the emotional shock they have undergone, said they had taken their poodle Rosa along with them to an evening meal.
>
> They asked a waiter over to their table and pointed to the poodle while they made eating motions, to show that they wanted it to be fed.

> There was some difficulty communicating with the waiter they said, but eventually he took Rosa off into the kitchen under his arm. About an hour later he came back with their main dish. When they picked up the silver lid they found their poodle roasted inside, garnished with pepper sauce and bamboo shoots. The couple said they suffered from a mild nervous collapse and did not eat the dog. They returned to Zurich immediately.

The Guardian, 21 August 1971

We can respond to the story at three main levels of consciousness. First, we can react either to its concrete content -- for example, 'Ugh, Poor dog!' -- or by sympathising with the waiter. The content may immediately fit into our assumptions about the sentimentality and naivety of affluent Europeans. We can use cultural stereotypes to interpret the experience. At a second level of consciousness, we may respond in a more detached reflective way. We can distance the content of the story by recourse to some simple form of explanation, to the effect that people see things differently. Our interpretation of the surface content of the story can be mediated by an implicit 'theory' that culture varies with geographical or social position. We can go on to link this generalization with the analysis of people's differing 'life styles,' their 'world views', and related social and economic organization.

This brings us into a third level of consciousness in which we can interpret the story by thinking about the participants' structure of consciousness. We could interpose a more explicit theory of how culture is constituted by three main elements: symbolic forms which select and coordinate people's individual experience (in this case, crude symbolic forms, gesture and mime); conventions of usage developed through interaction within social groups (hence the cultural misinterpretations which led to Rosa's demise)[11]; and systems of beliefs, values and action.

As the story of Rosa points out, some cultural transmissions are not mutually appreciated and are better left unsent. To hold to the culinary for a moment, the Saudis are not interested in our variegated ways of cooking pork; Americans, similarly, show little curiosity about the

cuisine of camel or dhubb.* There is a perceived need among Saudi leaders, however, to emulate American technological expertise and industrial productivity. Indeed, American educators are called in to assist in these areas. Conversely, America finds itself in an acknowledged axiological crisis,[12] while from Arabia can come an insightful scheme of social, ethical values. Some areas of concern are shared by both cultures -- e.g., the role of women -- without either Saudis or Americans seeing the other as the source of much wise counsel. Literacy education comes to mind in this vein with the Marxist, socialist countries as a frequent model for Arabia or America.[13]

The principle of addressing mutually acknowledged needs forces a dilemma, since few American educators have looked to Arabian culture in any small way as a model for our own advancement. Some tentative areas for American initiative will be offered below to provide a balanced, multicultural analysis. Clearly, this is an unexplored avenue due perhaps to our overgeneralized (and complacent) self-image as a "developed country."

The "third level of consciousness" which Reynolds and Skilbeck propose is an appropriate plane on which to develop a plan for multicultural education. The Western "work ethic" is a "system" at this level as is the Saudis' ethical dedication to their "personal (as individuals) responsibility

*a desert lizard

for the moral ordering of the natural world."[14] These are representative of needs which are respectively perceived and the cutural systems which might be shared in response to said needs.

A Note On Method

Curriculum theorists in North America have developed a literature in the last decade which has relevance for multicultural education as outlined here. Paul Klohr summaries the reconceptualist view in this way:

1. A holistic, organic view is taken of man and his relation to nature.
2. The individual becomes the chief agent in the construction of knowledge; that is, he is a culture creator as well as a culture bearer.
3. The curriculum theorist draws heavily on his own experiential base as method.
4. Curriculum theorizing recognizes as major resources the preconscious realms of experience.
5. The foundational roots of their theorizing lie in existential philosophy, phenomenology and radical psychoanalysis, also drawing on humanistic reconceptualizations of such cognate fields as sociology, anthropology, and political science.
6. Personal liberty and the attainment of higher levels of consciousness become central values in the curriculum process.
7. Diversity and pluralism are celebrated in both social ends and in the proposals projected to move toward those ends.
8. A reconceptualization of supporting political-social operations is basic.
9. New language forms are generated to translate fresh meanings--metaphors, for example.[15]

Florence Krall has undertaken multicultural curriculum development with these themes in mind in her work among the Navajo. The vitality of such "ethno-ecological per-

spectives"[16] bears witness to their promise and is a useful example of the reconceptualist point of view manifested in a multicultural context. For the past two years the pages of Educational Researcher have been the locus of an intense discussion[17] of reconceptualist curriculum theory without sufficient treatment of Klohr's "common threads" and the varied work (e.g., Krall's) which is conducted within this framework.

Case One: Vocational Education

Documents like the Second Development Plan 1975-80[18] of Saudi Arabia make clear the Saudi commitment to achieving technological self-sufficiency. Currently the kingdom is dependent on up to two million foreign contractees from Yemen, Egypt, Palestine, Pakistan, South Korea, Western Europe, the United States and many other countries. These men (and a small contingent of women) serve in trades, professions, and as laborers throughout Saudi Arabia. Without question, a proper Saudi aim is the training of a competent, modern work force.

At the Educational Research Center the staff had the privilege of working with Professor George Wright, Director of the University of Wisconsin's Rehabilitation Research Institute. At the Saudis' request he developed a proposal for introducing "Vocational Rehabilitation Counseling" into the graduate curriculum of the College of Education. As

the ERC worked on its response to this well-considered and detailed proposal the scope of the problem before us became most clear. In theory such a graduate program can be seen as a useful resource in the quest for technological competence. A cadre of Saudi professionals would become available to aid in the redirection of persons whose skills (often pastoral) were in diminishing demand.

What did the program entail? The education in America of a corps of Saudi vocational rehabilitation counselors in an academic environment where a curriculum in the field was at the same time being translated into Arabic for use in Riyadh University's future graduate program. The language barrier in this and other efforts limits overseas study to the few whose foreign language aptitude is high while continually raising the problem of massive translation for those who study at home. In a specialized area such as this one, there is little material in translation whereas graduate study, to be meaningful, requires a sizeable array of primary and support materials.

The curricularists who studied the proposal sensed that the college might be moving too far from a rightful sequence in its expansion. The proposal led the college into a specialization when some more fundamental fields (e.g., clinical psychology) had only recently gotten underway. (Could such a sub-discipline, it was asked, which has evolved in a modern, industrial state, actually make a

difference in a context as removed as that of Arabia? It is easy enough to answer in the negative, but more difficult to propose other more promising courses of action.

Ambivalence was such that the proposal was left unfunded, although the problem, of course, remains. Let us, for a moment, entertain another approach. Even America, with its elaborate institutional superstructure, appears to be losing touch with a key fundament of its technological expertise, i.e., what is popularly called the "work ethic." This attitude toward labor is vital to the Saudi quest for development. In terms of both what ought and what can be done to improve technological competence, effort may well be best focused on the affective development of the young. Riyadh, by some measures, is currently the busiest construction site in the world. Contractors are at work building all the systems and structures of a modern metropolis. With the industrial world's technology at work in the city's streets there should be means for educating the young in the attitudes and skills of technological competence by drawing on the life of the growing capital.

In a spirit of reciprocity there is a lesson concerning the work ethic which America could well learn from Arabia. Family life and the life of the community have high standing in the Saudis' Islamic scale of values and, consequently, the Saudis view of work is an integrated one. They realize, in other words, that a person on the job is not without his or her

larger, personal context. The arrangements made for production should account for the larger and humane goals of society. It seems clear that in this respect, it is we who are the developing society.

Case Two: Computer Assisted Instruction

A Saudi at work on his doctorate was invited to propose how his dissertation work might be conducted in Riyadh. His response was an application of research at Stanford University's Institute for Mathematical Studies in the Social Sciences to the teaching of English and mathematics to junior high school age public school students. At least thirty terminals would be made available with programs adapted to Arabic script and numerals where necessary. Classes of students would rotate in daily use of the facility. The software had previously undergone lengthy testing in America.

Researchers at the ERC saw this proposal as having considerable promise. First, Saudi Arabia is caught in a chronic teacher shortage[19] and judicious "automation" of some aspects of instruction would be helpful. Secondly, as befits a traditional society, instructional methodology tends to be traditional with a special reliance on rote and recitation. Educational technology is widely perceived in Riyadh as a means to fruitfully vary the tenor of instruction. Finally, the proposal targeted two curricular areas -- grammar and arithmetic -- where the exhaustive, individualized

operation of the computer would be appropriately exploited.

To the frustration of some, this project was not approved. The College of Education's Council (made up largely of department heads) rejected it after study. The reasons included a natural, inertial avoidance of what is new and strange and, perhaps of more interest, a distrust of CAI as contrary to humane values. In American circles this latter argument may be perceived as excessive but it bears examination for it offers a view of our society from those outside of it. This point of view was argued by professors whose own graduate study was done in the U.S.A.

It remains the opinion of this observer that, good intentions aside, a valuable opportunity was missed and that CAI has a place in Saudi education. Reciprocally, if it is indeed of value to see ourselves as others see us, the lesson here for Americans is clear: an impersonal, behaviorist point of view may pervade our society and characterize us before the world more than we acknowledge.

Case Three: Intermediate Reading Materials

Time-Life International circulated in Riyadh a proposal to translate a number of its Nature and Science volumes into Arabic and promote their circulation in the Near East and North Africa.[20] The proposal was looking for a home, as it were, and came to the Educational Research Center for appraisal.

The concept is enticing: to promote "basic scientific and technical literacy" through the dissemination of these popular and acclaimed volumes. As an incentive, the publisher would develop a special volume on "Islam." In the Riyadh Schools Study[21] and other purely bibliographical inquiries it has been found that there is a profound need for such publications in Arabic. Apparently there is a gap in the output of the Arabic publishing industry (centered in Beirut and Cairo) which creates a shortage of materials designed to aid in the transition from basic literarcy to expertise in reading. Books for the young adolescent reader, replete with illustrations, are not available in sufficient number across all relevant fields. The implications of this for educators are clear.

This well-conceived project remains in limbo while over a million dollars in funding is sought out. As a promising example of curriculum development for Saudi education it stands out and provokes some further considerations. Representational art is largely proscribed in Islam,[22] and traditionally calligraphy and geometric art have been promoted in its place. Areas of artistic endeavor which could well be enlarged in the Saudi curriculum without provoking charges of heresy include graphic design and architecture. What would be of benefit is not so much the training of practitioners, as the enhancement of popular appreciation of these largely non-representa-

tional, but aesthetic, fields. The rationale underlying this suggestion is the concept of personal growth fostered by a broad aesthetic awareness. As has been indicated, representational art (as well as music and dance) is suspect in Muslim culture, so viable alternatives must be developed if aesthetics are not to be left out of the curriculum.

Although Americans may little profit from a rejection of representational art, there is a cross-cultural lesson we might learn from the Saudis in this area. Islam remains a very pure form of monotheism and the Prophet Mohammed's strictures on image-making effectively bar the faithful from conjuring an image of Allah, who instead remains exclusively a spiritual presence -- not an image. While this may be of interest only to theologians, a corollary effect should interest educators: experiencing the restraint on image-making present throughout Saudi Arabia, one grows aware of how clotted the American scene is with a surfeit of images and may set out to investigate the consequences of this. Through contrast with cultures alien to our own it is possible to make discriminations which otherwise might elude us. Plato's Parable of the Cave comes to mind as the curricularist seeks to put aside illusion, whether it is fostered by a restrictive starkness or the confusion of crowding.

Case Four: Political and Social Life

Saudi Arabia is a theocratic, tribal kingdom whose political system is coping with a magnitude of wealth and a rate of change unmatched in today's world. Saudi politics is characterized by benevolent paternalism and access around channels to figures in authority. Interestingly, the system works best on the largest issues, and, perhaps, least well in daily affairs of small import. Political theory is fraught with controversy, but a passing comment may be in order. Americans could well encourage the qualities of personal responsibility and access which are inherent in Saudi politics. Saudis, on the other hand, would be aided in their quest for development by a greater ability to adhere to "the rule of law," in the Western sense, in some specific areas of political and social life. The benevolence which, often enough, functions well on a large scale makes minor tasks of life loom large as contextual ethics are applied to institutional regulations of all sorts.

Social mores provide another highly subjective but promising context for multicultural curriculum development. The Saudi love of rhetoric, for example, makes America seem a taciturn place in comparison. This dedication to expressive language is sometimes a burden, however, as the description of accomplishment replaces accomplishment itself.

Conclusion

In consonance with the values and theoretic stance put forth at the outset, ideas have been developed here which suggest directions for Saudi curricular reform and implications for America. The context of reform as it is currently implemented has been generated by reference to actual projects and proposals which have been prominent in educational research circles in Riyadh since 1977.

This observer is vitally aware of the difficulties of fostering development in Saudi Arabia as he is aware of our own frustrations as educators working in America. There does seem to be a valid multicultural road to educational development, however, which profits all parties concerned and denigrates none of them. An attitude of mutual respect and sharing is not platitudinous; it is the most effective guide to action. As collaboration goes on we must press our analyses to truly symbolic levels. Transfer on less profound planes are of use, but should not be programmed to the exclusion of values, attitudes, and unifying concepts.

Footnotes

1. Mohammed A. Rasheed, "Social Climate and Administrative Decision-Making: Research for Institutional Renewal." Ahmed El-Mahdi Abdel-Halim, "The Educational Research Center, Riyadh University: Objectives and Challenges." Paul Shaker, "Education R & D in Saudi Arabia: An Ethnomethodological Analysis." Presented at AERA, 1979, and available from the Educational Research Center, Riyadh University, Saudi Arabia.

2. Ahmed El-Mahdi Abdel-Halim and Paul Shaker, "A Strategy for Promoting Educational Reform in Developing Countries." Presented at AERA, 1979.

3. Particularly in New York City.

4. Dr. Miles served as critic in the Division B session alluded to above.

5. cf. B. J. Benham, "None So Holy as the Recently Converted -- Malefic Generosity and Multicultural Education," Educational Studies 9 (Summer, 1978): 125-131. Also Carl A. Grant, ed., Multicultural Education: Commitments, Issues and Applications (Washington: ASCD, 1977).

6. Paul Moorman, "The Golden Age of Islamic Education," Change (March, 1978): p. 14.

7. Khomeini in Iran and the Otaiba seizure of the Grand Mosque in Mecca are manifestations of this rising political force.

8. Denis Goulet, "An Ethical Model for the Study of Values," Harvard Educational Review 41 (May, 1971): p. 47.

9. Maxine Greene, "Pedagogy and Praxis: The Problem of Malefic Generosity." Paper presented at the Institute for Critical Studies, (Buffalo, N.Y., 1976, p. 3.

10. Richard F. Nyrop, et alia, Area Handbook for Saudi Arabia (Washington: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1977), p. 91.

11. John Reynolds and Malcolm Skilbeck, Culture and the Classroom (London: Open Books Publishing, Ltd., 1976), pp. 1-2.

12. e.g. production vs. pollution

13. This popular point of view was reaffirmed in the writer's mind by interviews he had in 1979 with the director of ALECSO in Cairo and the regional director of UNESCO in Bangkok.

14. Caesar E. Farah, Islam: Beliefs and Observances (Woodbury, N. Y.: Barron's Educational Series, Inc., 1968, p. 135.

15. Paul Klohr, "Curriculum Theory: The State of the Field," Paper presented at The Xavier Curriculum Theory Conference, Cincinnati, Ohio, 1974), p.

16. Florence R. Krall, "Navajo Tapestry: A Curriculum for Ethno-Ecological Perspectives." Paper presented at the Journal of Curriculum Theorizing Conference, Airlie, Virginia, 1979.

17. See William Pinar, "Notes on the Curriculum Field," Educational Researcher, 7 (August, 1978), pp. 5-12. Also, Daniel Tanner and Laurel N. Tanner, "Emancipation from Research: The Reconceptualist Prescription," Educational Researcher 8 (June, 1979), pp. 8-12. William H. Schubert, "Recalibrating Educational Research: Toward a Focus on Practice" Educational Research 9 (January, 1980), p. 21. Also the "Letters" column of ER during this entire period.

18. Second Development Pan 1975-80, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia: Ministry of Planning, 1976).

19. Moorman, p. 14.

20. "Proposal for a Saudi Arabian/Time-Life Books Cooperative Publishing Project" (Amsterdam: Time-Life International, 1979).

21. The Riyadh Schools Study Report, (Riyadh, Saudi Arabia: Educational Research Center, Riyadh University, 1978).

22. This is particularly two of the Saudi Wahhabi sect of Islam.